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Soviet underground journal reappears

Chronicle of Current Events is circulating,
with spotlight on civil-rights violations

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The KGB was supposed to have squashed it in November, 1972. But the allegedly defunct Chronicle of Current Events, which for three years kept a small group of Soviet intellectuals informed of violations of civil rights in their homeland, is appearing again.

The last complete issue to become known in the West was No. 27 of October, 1972. The three typewritten issues (Nos. 28 to 30) now made available to foreign correspondents in Moscow were shorter than usual and contained little that had not been known.

A foreword to No. 28 stated that publication of the Chronicle had been discontinued because of "repeated and unmistakable threats of the KGB [the Soviet secret police] to respond to every new issue with arrests of people suspected of publishing or distributing the Chronicle."

'Replacements flow in'

The Chronicle's reappearance confirms a recent statement of dissident writer Vladimir E. Maximov in Paris that all forms of dissidence have not been crushed. "Replacements [of arrested or exiled] dissidents are constantly flowing in whose goals are honorable and whose thoughts pure and irreproachable." Quoting an old Russian saying, Mr. Maximov added, "A holy place is never empty."

Mr. Maximov is in France as the guest of the French PEN club. An amusing sidelight on Soviet bureaucracy is that he was not allowed to accept the original invitation. Having been expelled from the Soviet Writers Union, Mr. Maximov, despite the vast popularity of his published writings, officially had become an unemployed person. In the eyes of the authorities

he no longer was a writer and therefore not qualified to accept the invitation of a foreign writers' association.

A way out had to be found. A Frenchman of Russian origin invited Mr. Maximov as a private person. In this capacity he was permitted to leave.

Asked to explain why the government had given him this permission, Mr. Maximov answered: "The authorities are getting people out of the country in one way or another. . . . Evidently the aim is to get rid of the most active representatives of the intelligentsia."

"Why are they being let out instead of being sent to prison camp as before?" Mr. Maximov was asked. His reply: "The political overheads, so to speak, would be too great." The Soviet leaders, the author intimated, have to be concerned with international public opinion. "Many [Western] statesmen are forced to bring this matter to the attention of our leaders."

The oppositional literature which Mr. Maximov called "above all an honest literature" is "not guided by any doctrine save a moral one."

Crucial role seen

Asked how many of the about 250 million Soviet citizens know about oppositional literature, Mr. Maximov replied that all literature published abroad always has been read in Russia only by a minority. "But its role in Russian history was none the smaller."

People listen to foreign broadcasts. This has brought about a change. "After 'Gulag Archipelago' appeared,

Solzhenitsyn's books . . . became very popular even among simple people. . . . Although only excerpts of his works are read and comprehension is made difficult by [radio] jamming, so that people often lose the thread, . . . the general mood seems to turn in Solzhenitsyn's favor."

"What do you know about the distribution in the Soviet Union of books of yours published abroad?" Mr. Maximov was asked.

"I know that more and more people are reading them. . . . There is verbal reaction and also a certain amount of written reaction which reaches me."

Before leaving for France, Mr. Maximov had seen his samizdat novels "in various forms — printed, photocopied, and as pamphlets."

Hitherto only religious publications were secretly printed. The fact that novels now occasionally can be printed by underground presses and that dissidents are able to photocopy their documents has brought about an important change in the situation.

Partly this change may be due to a slight relaxation of official vigilance, especially where not altogether political authors are concerned. It also may be the result of the increasing introduction of Xerox and related copying machines in Soviet institutes and enterprises. The KGB, which perhaps is not quite as efficient as it is made out to be, is hardly able to keep all these machines under constant supervision.

These are the facts, together with the sheer incredible selflessness and dedication of the dissidents, which explain such developments as the renewed publication of the Chronicle of Current Events.